

Let me preface my remarks by saying that these remarks refer to the media in the city of Chicago IL, where I currently live and work. I'll focus my remarks around the questions that the FCC has posed, which I will answer in turn.

(1) How do your broadcasters use radio and television to respond to the community's needs and interests? What are they doing well?

That depends on the broadcaster. The only radio broadcasters in Chicago which I have found to be responsive to community interests are predominantly affiliated with college and universities in and around Chicago--or in one instance, an unlicensed broadcaster. They allow community needs and interests to by allowing members of the community to either partake in certain shows, or create their own shows, and their funding predominantly stems from listener and university support, which allows them the freedom to explore issues without having to worry about commercial concerns.

There is one notable commercial radio exception to this pattern, and it is exceptional in a number of ways: I'm referring to WVON, a part-time radio station owned and staffed by Chicago's African-American community. WVON addresses community needs very well, perhaps better than any other radio station in Chicago -- perhaps because, I suspect, of the solid infrastructure behind the station.

Regarding Chicago television, the only coverage toward community needs and interests in Chicago is Chicago's fleet of public access cable channels, CAN TV (Chicago Access Network Television). Again, its great strength is in letting people make their own shows and participate in CAN TV shows, so that everyone from to community organizers to schoolteachers to labor unions can become the media.

In the major commercial broadcast media in Chicago, both radio and TV, coverage of community issues barely rises to the level of a bad joke. What passes for local coverage consists of reports of street crime or the latest vapid press conference from Mayor Daley.

I should say that also say that the supposedly "public" broadcasters in Chicago, like the local NPR affiliate WBEZ and the main local PBS affiliate WTTW, aren't much better than their corporate counterparts. In fact, I am involved in campaigns to broaden the station's programming in one case (WBEZ), and to radically restructure the ownership and funding and internal operations in another case (WTTW). And in both cases, it can be a long uphill climb to get community input or community content on the air.

(2) Are there certain kinds of local programming that you believe should be available but that are not being provided by local broadcasters? If so, what are they?

Fortunately, there are examples to point to on certain broadcasters in radio and TV which would be suitable examples, like the weekly labor TV show "Labor Beat" television on CAN TV, and the Cliff Kelley Show on WVON (where matters of local politics and issues get ample discussion).

We need more shows and more content like this, where members of the community can have a say and can provide content, and we need financial and infrastructural support for current and new local media initiatives.

(3) Are broadcasters well informed about important issues and events in the community?

Again, that depends on the broadcaster. The rule of thumb is: the more a broadcaster is connected to the big players (NBC, CBS, ABC, Fox, WGN), the less informed the broadcaster tends to be informed on local issues.

I have found that local, community, non-profit media are far more amenable to learning about issues about the community. And sometimes such media bring new issues and events to my advance attention which I wouldn't have known otherwise. For example, a community broadcaster gave me a tip that FCC chair Michael Powell, would be coming to Chicago, and that I should do something about it. So I did: I helped organize a protest against Michael Powell in December 2003.

Corporate media tend to be behind the curve on community matters. I can cite example after example of instances in which corporate media personnel were woefully ignorant on pressing issues involving the community. Two come readily to mind: one is the massive antiwar protests which swept Chicago (and the globe) in early 2003; I'm reminded of one photojournalist in a short film I had seen who asked, when faced with a giant (and prescient) antiwar protest, "What's going on here?". A second involves the FCC's own Low Power FM initiative. I had told an employee of a major media outlet in Chicago about the FCC's approval of Low Power FM. He had never heard of the fact before.

Again, I think that the players at Chicago's main NPR and PBS affiliates (WBEZ and WTTW) fare little better in this regard. In the case of WBEZ, programming tends to be fluffy, substantive issues are seldom aired, and the rest is national feeds or jazz. WTTW is even worse; they didn't even know about the FCC's media ownership rule changes of June 2, 2003 until community organizers _told them_. For more thoughts on WTTW, see my remarks in question one.

(4) Are there any segments of the local community that you believe are not being adequately served? How could broadcasters meet the needs of such groups?

The 2000 U.S. Census counted the demographics of Chicago as 26% Black, 20% Latino. By this logic, the percentage of guests and media staff and producers in the main media in Chicago should aim to reflect these demographic percentages. They don't.

It gets worse. For one, Chicago has a serious portion of non-English speakers. To mention one example: This city has more Polish speakers than any other city on Earth whose name isn't "Warsaw", and yet the only Polish language broadcast media in Chicago that I know of comprise a couple of brokered radio stations.

It gets worse still. Probably some 80% of Chicagoans would qualify as poor or working class, and yet the overwhelming majority of local media even on our PBS caters to the well-to-do.

To meet the needs of these groups would require a serious revamping of the existing major broadcasting media and a supercharging of Chicago's existing local media infrastructure. I discuss specific proposals below.

(5) What, if anything, should the FCC do to promote more localism in broadcasting?

What success there is in localism in Chicago's broadcasting stems from local stations, funded by the community, beholden to the local community, and with

content by local communities. Therefore, the FCC should enact policies to foster more local TV and radio stations. The Low-Power FM initiative that the FCC has enacted in February 2004 is one positive step; the FCC should enact more such policies.

Specific policy choices I would suggest are as follows:

(1) Change the funding structure of major broadcasters from a commercial model to a popular-funded model, perhaps involving a BBC-style licensing system, or one involving excise taxes on TV and radio receivers. This freedom from the profit motive would help allow more local content (which can be anathema to profit motive broadcasting).

(2) Enact strict media ownership limits. The dearth of localism we've seen in most media can be directly connected to the raising--or razing--of ownership limits. If you had a law which said that only one person or company can own one radio or TV station, localism in media would immediately skyrocket.

(3) Direct the deployment of technologies toward local ends. The Low-Power FM initiative is one example; free and open Wi-Fi networks and open spectrum initiatives are others.

(4) Apply the antitrust laws currently on the book. Localism is being strangled by mammoth corporations who strangle localism in the name of profit. Bringing an antitrust slingshot against these bloated Goliaths, coupled with these other initiatives outlined above, can markedly change the environment for fostering local content.

(5) Ensure that the FCC's Localism Task Force promptly return calls from people who care and are working to promote localism in media. It makes the Task Force and the FCC look bad.

Thank you.